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Edifice Complex: The Wrong Way To House DHS

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On Nov. 2, The Post reported that the [National Capital Planning Commission](#) has found that a large new headquarters in Anacostia for the [Department of Homeland Security](#) "would overwhelm the historic hilltop site in Anacostia where it would be built."

But that's not the whole story. This new compound would pose an unnecessary security risk to DHS and is questionable financially, environmentally and logistically. I would urge DHS officials to revisit an alternative 2004 plan supported by **Adm. William A. Owens**, former vice chairman of the [Joint Chiefs of Staff](#).

I reviewed the alternative plan for the **Harvard International Review**, **Urban Land Magazine** and Maryland's Department of Business and Economic Development. The 2004 plan, proposed by former [Defense Department](#) planner Alan Feinberg and systems engineer Jay Hellman, avoids a Pentagon-style headquarters and would distribute DHS workplaces throughout [Maryland](#), [Virginia](#) and elsewhere. It envisions DHS's headquarters as a small, high-security "front office," not a huge complex dependent on a horde of daily commuters.

Commonly, telework means that some staffers sometimes work remotely. Under the Hellman-Feinberg plan, DHS employees would staff regional workplaces full time, linked to headquarters around the clock by the Internet. This nationally replicable plan offers benefits for security, efficiency, budget savings, the environment, transportation and working conditions.

For example, [La Plata](#) was studied as a prototype teleworking hub. Many of La Plata's 8,400-plus residents work in Washington and drive 30 miles twice a day on congested roads. But four intersecting fiber-optic networks make a La Plata broadband grid possible immediately. La Plata has heralded technological change twice. It was born in 1888 after Pennsylvania Railroad Co. trains began serving the area. Then, as tobacco farming dwindled, highways let La Platans work further out. Now, as a model e-burb, La Plata could spearhead small-town revitalization as teleworkers transform bedroom communities into round-the-clock, functioning small towns.

Adm. Owens, voicing concern about technological under-performance, described the La Plata plan as "a fine example" of how government must "work with the private sector imaginatively on pioneering projects" to maintain U.S. prosperity and security.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/30/AR2007113001868.html>

In 2004, **Aris Melissaratos**, former vice president of science and technology for Westinghouse Electric Co. and then Maryland's business and economic development secretary, e-mailed **Tom Lockwood**, then-director of D.C. regional coordination for the Department of Homeland Security, that the tele-community plan was "a great idea" for the region and for the department. **Rep. Cliff Stearns** (R-Fla.), vice chairman of the House subcommittee on telecommunications and the Internet, has said that "a dispersed, Internet-driven scheme" would present security, economic, environmental and transportation benefits.

DHS and area officials should revisit the 2004 plan. The agency should commission a geographic information system map, displaying potential work sites, infrastructure, workforce distribution and other data. This would help assess the potential to regionalize DHS workplaces.

The results would illuminate more options than the agency thinks it has.

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